



THE CHURCH IN MALTA

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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WE CANNOT TURN A DEAF EAR TO THE CRIES OF THOSE WHO ARE DYING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

STATEMENT BY THE MALTESE BISHOPS

We are witnessing yet again, practically helplessly and without much general interest, to another tragedy of people who are perilously crossing the Mediterranean from the African continent searching with hope for a better life for themselves and their families. This time, in spite of the resistance met en route by these people, the danger of the latest crossing was significantly diminished due to the timely intervention of voluntary organisations that dedicate their resources and abilities to come to the aid of the poorest of the poor.¹ The tragedies of the poor of the world are fast turning into mere breaking news items that are quickly discarded in the trash can of history! Pope Francis was right during his first official visit to the European Parliament in 2014, to entreat the European leaders not to let the Mediterranean become a cemetery for immigrants.²

In spite of the promises made by the leaders of European countries to meet in concrete terms the needs of immigrants and refugees searching for shelter and a future in Europe, it seems that there is little political will to give urgent consideration to this worthy cause. While countries are busy discussing the Gross Domestic Product and disposable income, the risk persists that the people in the periphery languish in poverty and are reduced to mere numbers in some computer. During the same visit to the European Parliament, the Pope had said that “the time has come for a building a Europe which revolves not around the economy, but around the sacredness of the human person”. We observe leaders wreathed in smiles busy posing for event photographs while throngs of people applaud inspiring speeches. It seems that this is where it ends. How right Pope Francis was during his first visit to the island of Lampedusa at the beginning of his pontificate in 2013, to condemn “the globalisation of indifference” in the

¹<http://www.lastampa.it/2018/01/27/italia/cronache/ottocento-migranti-salvati-in-mare-due-morti-ed-scontro-tra-ong-e-guardia-costiera-libica-4kf5LgLMNcr44MRfXKmuDM/pagina.html>

²<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-europe/stop-mediterranean-becoming-vast-migrant-cemetery-pope-tells-europe-idUSKCN0J911320141125>

face of the phenomenon of the abuse of the poor and continuous tragedies in the Mediterranean and other parts of the world.

In the Exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel', Pope Francis writes that "the need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 202). Similarly, in the very first Message for the World Day of the Poor, the Pope continues that "if we want to help change history and promote real development, we need to hear the cry of the poor and commit ourselves to ending their marginalization."

These words apply equally to the political class, to society in general and also to the Church. In fact in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope insists that "any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments" (par. 207).

Therefore, the Church in Malta and Gozo welcomes with joy the recent news that the Italian Episcopal Conference is launching an "Encounter of Reflection and Spirituality for Peace in the Mediterranean", with the participation of Catholic bishops of countries around the Mediterranean basin. This meeting of the peoples of the Mediterranean will endeavour not to allow the cries and the hopes of the poor be drowned and buried in the Mediterranean. This initiative also aims to serve as an exchange of cultures and peoples, and to rouse Europe to embrace the poor that are knocking on its doors.³

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³http://www.migrantesonline.it/siti_migrantes/migrantes_online/00021241_Cei_sulla_rotta_del_Mare_Nostrum.html